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## RITUAL ACTIVITIES OF *TARIQAS* IN ZANZIBAR

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**ABSTRACT** The aim of this paper is to describe the activities of *tariqas* (Islamic ritual orders that perform *zikri*, the practice of reciting the name of God repeatedly) in Zanzibar, and to show the importance of their practices in local culture. Since the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the spread of *tariqas*, such as Tariqa Qadiriyya from southern Somalia by Uways b. Muḥammad al-Barawī and Tariqa Shadhiliyya from the Comoros by Muḥammad Maʿrūf b. Aḥmad b. Abū Bakr, contributed to the Islamization of the Swahili Coast. Zanzibar emerged as one of the early centers of Islamic scholarship in East Africa where *tariqas* disseminated Islamic doctrine and related Islamic rituals. Today *tariqas* found all over Zanzibar are active on the anniversary of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday (*maulidi*), the festival after the end of Ramaḍān (*idi el fitr*), the festival of sacrifice (*idi el haji*), during visitations to saints' tombs (*ziara*), wedding celebrations (*harusi*), the fortieth day of mourning (*arobaini*), and other occasions. This paper demonstrates how *tariqas* also play an important role in the daily life of Zanzibari people, even if local Muslims are not always aware of the *tariqa* origins of some activities.

**Key Words:** *Tariqa*; *Zikri* ritual; Islamic practice; Zanzibar; Swahili Coast.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the activities of *tariqas* in Zanzibar and illustrates how the ritual activities of *tariqas* are deep-rooted in the life of the Swahili Coast.<sup>(1)</sup> *Tariqa* is an Islamic ritual order that perform *zikri*, which has its root in the Arabic word *dhikr* and generally means to recite the name of God repeatedly.

The Zanzibar Archipelago is located 35 kilometers northeast of the Tanzanian mainland. It consists of Unguja, Pemba, and other smaller islands<sup>(2)</sup> with a total area of 2,460 km<sup>2</sup>. Nearly 99% of the population of 984,600 (2002 census)<sup>(3)</sup> is Muslim.

In the Swahili Coast, people have been actively engaged in trade for centuries. Trade influenced the frequent social interaction among people with different cultural backgrounds. In the nineteenth century, Zanzibar became the capital of the Al-Busaidi dynasty (Oman) that was powerful throughout the Indian Ocean World. At that time, Zanzibar was also playing an important role as the center of commerce in the region. Consequently, Zanzibar developed as one of the centers of Islamic studies in East Africa and many members of *tariqas* such as the Qadiriyya and the Shadhiliyya visited and contributed to spread Islam in the coastal region and the communities along the trade routes (Lodhi & Westerlund, 1999: 99; Nimtz, 1980: 62–71).<sup>(4)</sup> Their doctrines were accepted because the *tariqas*' doctrines were tolerant of local customs and they were regarded as more egalitarian than clerical Islam because of their status was based more on piety rather than on learning (Nimtz, 1980: 56). It has been estimated that more than one-third of Tanzania's

population is Muslim and that 70% of Muslims belonged to *tariqas* (Nimtz, 1995: 182–183). Not only have *tariqas* become widely popular among people, but their practices have influenced other areas of people's daily life, such as visitations to saints' tombs (*ziara*), wedding celebrations (*harusi*), the fortieth-day of mourning after funerals (*arobaini*), Islamic education in Qur'anic schools, and other occasions.

In spite of its important role in the Islamization of East Africa, few investigations have been conducted on the current situation with respect to *tariqas*. J.S. Trimingham—one of the earliest researchers in Islamic studies concerning East Africa—states that it is difficult to estimate the influence of the orders among the Swahili (Trimingham, 1964: 97). Perhaps this difficulty worked to deter modern scholars from perusing the issue. A.H. Nimtz and B.G. Martin provided details on *tariqa* leaders' political activities pertaining to the development of Tanganyika (the present Tanzania) (Nimtz, 1995; Martin 1969, 1976). Their works could be complemented by an analysis of the activities of *tariqa* members in order to determine the more general characteristics of *tariqas* themselves.

In contrast to research that focuses on the political aspects of *tariqas*, A. Bang's (2003) study mentions the family networks of Tariqa Alawiyya in East Africa. She discusses the *tariqa's* influence on Muhammad's birthday and Islamic education (Bang, 2003: 148–150, 173–187). The present study benefits from Bang's historical research, which allows one to better discern the effects of *tariqas* on many other occasions as well in the daily life in present-day Zanzibar. Furthermore, R. Loimeier's (2009) study on Islamic education in Zanzibar is also valuable to know today's Islamic situation in Zanzibar. As for *tariqas*, he mentions mainly the Qadiriyya and the Alawiyya and focuses on what an important role the Islamic scholars of *tariqas* played to build today's Islam in Zanzibar politically and culturally (Loimeier, 2009: 74–109).

While the preceding researches mostly focused on Islamic scholars and *tariqas'* political activities, this paper aims to demonstrate at a more local level the characteristics of the *tariqas* and their important role in the daily life of Zanzibari people.<sup>(5)</sup>

## TARIQAS IN ZANZIBAR

### I. Variety of *Tariqas*

This section examines the types of *tariqa* that are common in Zanzibar. The word “*tariqa*” generally means an order of Islamic mysticism that consists of three elements: following the doctrine of the patriarch, a spiritual genealogy that can be traced back to Prophet Muhammad (*silsila*) and *zikri* ritual (Hamada, 1994: 261; Horikawa, 2005: 161). Although not all the *tariqas* in Zanzibar include these elements, namely, following the doctrine of the patriarch and *silsila*, all of the Zanzibari orders do retain the *zikri* ritual. I have encountered many *tariqas* in Zanzibar: Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya, Alawiyya, Maulidi ya Homu, Kirama, Kigumi, Kijiti, Hochi, Hamziyya, and Dufu, and found there are more than 130 *zawiyas*

where their *zikri* rituals are performed (Fujii, 2007: 138–139).

We can generally classify *tariqas* in Zanzibar into three categories. The first category consists of the Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya, which are also widespread in the rest of the Islamic world. They retain the doctrine of the patriarch, *silsila*, and *zikri* ritual. The main branch of Qadiriyya, which the eponym is Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad °Abd al-Qādir b. Abī Ṣālih al-Jīlānī, was introduced by Uways b. Muḥammad al-Barawī (1847–1909) from Southern Somalia to Zanzibar in 1884 (Nimtz, 1980: 57). Today, Qadiriyya has more than 100 *zawiyas* throughout Zanzibar (Fujii, 2007). The order organizes the Tanzania Qadiriyya Association (Jumuiya Zawiyatul Qadiriya Tanzania), which has its head office in Arusha. The association also has branches in other countries such as Kenya, Congo, Burundi, and Dubai.

Shadhiliyya was established in Acre, Palestine, in 1862/1863 by °Alī Nūr al-Dīn b. Muḥammad b. Nūr al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maghribī al-Yashruṭī al-Shadhilī al-Tarshiḥī (ca. 1804–1891). Muḥammad Ma°rūf b. Aḥmad b. Abū Bakr, (1853–1905) brought the order from the Comoros to Zanzibar at the end of the nineteenth century (Martin, 1976: 154). At present, there are only five *zawiyas* in southern Zanzibar (Fujii, 2007). The *silsila* of the Shadhiliyya order was recorded from the Prophet to Muḥammad Ma°rūf.

The second category only contains Alawiyya. This *tariqa* was founded in Hadhramaut by Muḥammad b. °Alawī, known as al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam (d. 1255). He was the great-great grandson of °Alawī, the eponymous founder of the clan (Bang, 2003: 13). This order has transmitted the doctrine of the patriarch, *silsila*, and its practice of *zikri* ritual (Bang, 2003: 15–16). A character of this order is the limited membership;<sup>(6)</sup> Its members are restricted to people who can claim that they are descendants of the Prophetic family in Hadhramaut. (Bang, 2003: 13; Loimeier, 2009: 93, Nimtz, 1980: 62).

The third category includes Maulidi ya Homu, Kirama, Kigumi, Kijiti, Hochi, Hamziyya and Dufu. Maulidi ya Homu is the same as the Tariqa Rifaiyya, which is one of the oldest orders in East Africa and seems to have come first to Zanzibar from Aden (Nimtz, 1980: 62). Nowadays, however, few people are aware of the name Rifaiyya. Maulidi ya Homu means the “*mawlid* of monsoon.”<sup>(7)</sup> According to Maalim Majid Said Mansur (1930–), the leader of Maulidi ya Homu, their *zikri* expresses the movement of the sail of a dhow.<sup>(8)</sup> At present, they only have their *zikri* ritual, that is, they have neither *silsila* nor doctrine of the patriarch.<sup>(9)</sup> Maalim Majid also stated that the place and year in which the *tariqa* was established is unknown and that the *silsila* was lost when people in Zanzibar faced oppression after the Zanzibar Revolution in 1964.<sup>(10)</sup>

Kirama has been established in Donge, Northern Zanzibar, and they perform their *zikri* ritual after the °*ishā* prayer (the fifth of the five daily prayers) every Thursday. Shauri b. Hajji Mshirazi (d. 1913), who was born in Tumbatu, a northern island of Zanzibar, had founded this order after receiving *ijāza* (authorization to teach) from Uways b. Muḥammad, a leader of Qadiriyya. Therefore, many researchers regard Kirama as one of the branch of the Qadiriyya (Loimeier, 2009: 77; Nimtz, 1980: 58; Pouwels, 1987: 159; Trimmingham, 1964: 100). The leader, Abdul Samad Shadhili, and members themselves, however, did not accept Kirama

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the three categories of *tariqas*

Name of <i>Tariqa</i>	Category number	Characteristics
<i>Qadiriyya, Shadhiliyya</i>	1	Retaining <i>silsila</i> , following the doctrine of the patriarch, performing <i>zikri</i> rituals
<i>Alawiyya</i>	2	Retaining <i>silsila</i> , following the doctrine of the patriarch, performing <i>zikri</i> rituals, limited membership (“descendants” of the Prophetic family in Hadhramaut)
<i>Maulidi ya Homu, Kirama, Kigumi, Kijiti, Hochi, Hamziyya, Dufu</i>	3	Performing <i>zikri</i> rituals

as Qadiriyya branch but regarded Kirama as their original *tariqa* and the head-quarter is Donge Pangamaua. They rather stated the relationship with Shadhiliyya than Qadiriyya because the leader’s name included “Shadhili.” Abdul Samad Shadhili also explained that Kirama is the name of their *zikri*.<sup>(11)</sup> Today there are six *zawiyas* in Zanzibar, including Pemba Island (Fujii, 2007).

The other orders —Kigumi, Kijiti, Hochi, Hamziyya, and Dufu— were, according to their respective leaders, formed between 50 and 100 years ago. In many cases, they neither retain *silsilas* from Prophet Muḥammad nor the doctrine of the patriarch, but they have *zikri* rituals.<sup>(12)</sup>

Muhammad Idris Muhammad Saleh (1934–), a Zanzibari researcher of Comoro origin specializing in Islamic scholars in East African Coast,<sup>(13)</sup> classified the *tariqas* of the third category as offshoots of Qadiriyya or Alawiyya (Fujii, 2008b: 28). The members of these *tariqas* themselves, however, do not agree with this assertion and insist that they are original. The leaders state that the names of these *tariqas* are derived from the names of their respective *zikri* rituals, not the eponym, such as Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya (Fujii, 2008). Although they do not retain the doctrine of the patriarch and *silsila*, they do perform the *zikri* ritual. The *tariqas* of the third category seem to be quite characteristic of Zanzibar.

## II. Variety of *Zikri* Rituals

Generally people perform *zikri* rituals to unite spiritually with God in communities with mystical Islamic practices. Although individual *tariqas* have their own *zikri* rituals in terms of vocalization styles and physical expressions, they share several similarities. Men and women always practice in segregated areas; in the absence of more permanent structural divisions, a screen made of palm leaves may be used to separate the men from the women during the rituals. Moreover, they practice in the dark in order to concentrate on their *zikri*. Each gender-separate group forms a circle with their leader in the center and practices their *zikri* ritual continuously for hours —often, from midnight to dawn— without a break.

There are various organizational arrangements among the groups when they perform *zikri* rituals. For example, Tariqa Qadiriyya practice their *zikri* ritual surrounding the group’s original flag. On the flag, the *shahada* (profession of



**Fig. 1** *Zikri* ritual by Qadiriyya women in Makadara, Zanzibar (June 30, 2007).



**Fig. 2** *Zikri* ritual by Dufu in Stone Town, Zanzibar (December 20, 2007).

faith, meaning “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”) is sewn with white, red, and green cloth. During their *zikri* ritual, they swing their busts back and forth while blowing their breath from the back of the throat and saying “a,” which means “Allāh,” and certain words to praise God repeatedly.

In contrast to the other *tariqas*, the Dufu play a tambourine called *dufu*. They parade, shake themselves as if they were dancing, and recite words to praise God by reciting in rhythm with the tambourines.

## RITUAL ACTIVITIES OF *TARIQA*

### I. *Maulidi*

*Tariqas* practice *zikri* rituals on many occasions. One of the most important events in the Islamic world and for *tariqas* is the Prophet’s birthday, which is held on the twelfth day of *Rabīʿ al-ʿAwwal* in the Islamic calendar. It is commonly called *mawlid* in Arabic and *maulidi* in Swahili. The word “*mawlid*” originally meant the place and time of birth, and it is now also used to refer to the celebration honoring the Prophet’s birthday (*mawlid al-nabī*). In addition, it refers to Islamic saints’ birthdays and to texts that praise the Prophet.

The celebration of the Prophet’s birthday began in Egypt in the thirteenth century. Initially, only government officials and religious leaders were involved in the ritual. *Tariqas*, which were also just forming between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, gradually began playing an important role, and slowly but surely, the celebration spread to the entire Islamic world (Von Grunebaum, 2002(1951): 101–103; Otsuka, 1990: 87). Currently, almost all the *tariqas* in the world practice *zikri* rituals actively.

The Alawiyya brought the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday from Hadhramaut to the East African coast (Bang, 2003: 148). Large number of Hadhramis, who were also members of the Alawiyya, migrated to the areas around the Indian Ocean because of the dramatic climate changes and tribal conflicts in Hadhramaut. Their mobility and social networking contributed significantly to the spread of Islam and their culture (Arai, 2000: 179). Initially, the anniversary was celebrated only by a section of the elite. However, since 1902 —when the celebration was reorganized and held on public grounds— it began to be gradually popularized among the public (Bang, 2003: 148–150).

In the Islamic world, the event is generally held only on one day from sunset to the following morning. On the other hand, in Zanzibar, the celebration is carried out for three weeks in many places, starting from the Prophet’s birthday. In fact, the entire month in which Prophet’s birthday falls is very important to the people in Zanzibar.<sup>(14)</sup>

The celebrations are basically composed of two parts —the *maulidi* ritual and *zikri* rituals. In the *maulidi* ritual, an Islamic teacher recites the *maulidi* text of Barzanji<sup>(15)</sup> —the story of the Prophet’s life— and boys recite poetry (*qasidas*) to honor the Prophet on stage. There are approximately ten to twenty boys in

each group, who wear similar Islamic clothes.<sup>(16)</sup> The recitation of the *maulidi* text of Barzanjī and *qasidas* are performed alternately for three hours in many cases. After the *maulidi* ritual, the members of *tariqas* begin performing *zikri* rituals around the stage and many people also gather and join in the performance (Fujii, 2008a).

*Tariqas* also perform in public on other Islamic celebrations, *idi el fitr* (festival after the end of the month of Ramaḍān) and *idi el haji* (festival of sacrifice). They play *maulidi* and their *zikri* rituals in front of the houses and shops one by one to share happiness, hope and good luck. In these festivals, their activities are necessary not only for the members of *tariqas* but also people on the island.

## II. Other Ritual Activities

During celebrations such as Islamic weddings, children from Qur'anic schools recite *maulidi* texts and dance to the rhythm of tambourines. Thus, these celebrations are also called *maulidi* on occasion. By praising the Prophet, people also hope to get God's blessing (*baraka*) through the Prophet. *Tariqa* members also practice *zikri* rituals when, for example, they visit saints' tombs (*ziara*). In addition, *zikri* rituals are occasionally performed after the fortieth day of mourning (*arobaini*). They perform *zikri* rituals repeatedly overnight on such occasions.

## III. Educational Activities in Qur'anic schools

As mentioned above, there are many occasions on which *maulidi* texts and *zikri* rituals are recited and performed in Zanzibar. These *maulidi* texts are taught in Qur'anic schools. In Zanzibar, children aged five to eight years attend Qur'anic schools in order to gain basic knowledge of Islam. In most Qur'anic schools, tambourines are played in accompaniment to *maulidi* recitations. One teacher I



Fig. 3 *Zikri* practice at a Qur'anic school in Makadara, Zanzibar (November 8, 2006).



interviewed stated that if they did not play the tambourine, the children would become bored and unwilling to learn. Therefore, it is common for children in Zanzibar's Qur'anic schools to learn Islamic texts while playing and practicing recitation using tambourines. If the teacher is a leader of a *tariqa*, he/she will also teach children *zikri* rituals.

## CONCLUSION

This paper described the activities of *tariqas* in Zanzibar and illustrated the importance of their practices on other occasions in the daily life of the Swahili in order to answer the question of how the elements of *tariqas* became deep-rooted in the Zanzibar culture. For over a century, *tariqas* have spread throughout Zanzibar, and the people continue to practice *zikri* rituals actively at various times of the year. I also discussed how the rituals of *tariqas* play an important role in the lives of Zanzibar; this is particularly visible in the main Islamic festivals, in the rites of passage, and in the education of Qur'anic schools. *Maulidi* ritual is deeply concerned to Alawiyya, although not everyone is aware that it originated from *tariqas*. The ritual activities are an important means for the people to confirm their belief in God in a true manner. Since Zanzibar was a major destination along the thoroughfares of the East African coast, and as a result of a diffusion of cultural practices, similar cultures can be found in other places in East Africa as well.

As for further study, it will be valuable to focus on local *tariqa* of Zanzibar as mentioned in the third section, above, because understanding local characteristics and activities are central to knowing Islam in Zanzibar. It will also be important to focus on the members of the Alawiyya settled in the areas around the Indian Ocean from East Africa to Southeast Asia. Since the members of the Alawiyya have played an important role to establish the Islamic culture of these areas, similarities may be found that show the Islamic connection through the Indian Ocean.

## NOTES

- (1) Swahili Coast geographically means the coast and the islands from the south of Somalia to the north of Mozambique.
- (2) In this paper, Zanzibar means Unguja Island.
- (3) Tanzania National Website, 2002.
- (4) Prior to this time, Islam had spread only to the elite classes, like Arab Omanis, Arab Hadhramis, Comorians, and Indians.
- (5) The data of this paper is based on my anthropological field research, conducted from April to May 2005, and from September to December 2006.
- (6) Generally, a person can join any *tariqas*, even two or more different ones. In order to affiliate with the *tariqas*, a person takes an initiation ceremony, such as drinking a glass of water while a leader read a Qur'anic verse or handshake with a leader.
- (7) In the Islamic world, the word "*mawlid*" commonly means a recital honoring Prophet's

- birthday as well as people's birthdays in general, however, in Zanzibar the word "maulidi" has additional meanings. Here, the word "maulidi" clearly means *zikri* ritual.
- (8) May 11, 2005, Mkunazini, Zanzibar.
  - (9) Their *zikri* ritual is regarded as one of Zanzibar's cultural traditions, and there is a project underway to conserve it.
  - (10) Zanzibar became independent of Great Britain as Sultanate of Zanzibar at the end of 1963. The Arabs had continued to have hegemony politically. But Zanzibaris brought revolution with their leader John Okello from Uganda in January 1964. As a result they established People's Republic of Zanzibar. Many Arabs were killed and fled to Tanzania mainland and Kenya expecting the help of their relatives. Therefore the traditional Muslim scholarly and devotional leadership on the islands weakened.
  - (11) May 5, 2005–October 2, 2006. Donge Pangama, Zanzibar.
  - (12) For more information about these *tariqas*, see Fujii (2008b).
  - (13) May 10, 2005, Shangani, Zanzibar. According to Muhammad Idris, Kigumi, Kijiti, and Hochi are derived from Qadiriyya, while Hamziyya and Dufu from the Alawiyya. Loimeier also mentions Kijiti and Kitangungwa, which I just heard the name of "Kitangu" in Tumbatu, as the branch of the Qadiriyya (Loimeier, 2009: 77).
  - (14) In the 1980s, the Anṣār al-Sunna (helpers of the Sunna), who try to propagate their interpretation of Islam in opposition to "local Swahili" cultural influences and the corruption of the "West," started to criticize the *maulidi* celebration. But because the ritual has retained its popularity and has come to be celebrated not only on the Prophet's birthday, but on many occasions throughout the year and also is an integral part of Islamic education, they have adopted a more conciliatory approach and reduced their critique of *maulidi* (Loimeier, 2009: 126-131).
  - (15) Barzanjī (Ja'far b. Hasan b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Barzanjī, 1690–1764), who is the author of the text, was born in Medina in 1690 and was a preacher at the Prophet's Mosque. He was a mufti in Muslim law according to the Shāfiʿī sect. The text of Barzanjī is the most popular book in Zanzibar (Harries, 1962: 103).
  - (16) Girls do not recite *maulidi* texts on stage, since they are only allowed to sit in the audience.

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